One Island, Working Together

Speech From the Throne

November 12, 2009

Madame Speaker and
Members of the Legislative Assembly,

In the name of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, it is again my honour and privilege to welcome you to the 3rd Session of the 63rd General Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

In the time since the people of Prince Edward Island indicated their desire for a change in direction for our provincial community, a great deal has been accomplished by my Government. Our Island Community is stronger – and has proven itself more than capable of withstanding the challenges that have arisen in the world.

Our place in the world community is a fortunate one. We are favoured by our distance from the conflicts and poverty that torment so much of the world; we are blessed by our membership in the Canadian family; and we are deeply appreciative of an Island community that treats our neighbours as well as we ourselves would wish to be treated.

Our Island is deeply respectful of the men and women who serve in our armed forces in a selfless effort to protect each and every one of us. We offer our thanks to those Canadians who put themselves in harm's way to provide comfort and solace to those afflicted.

This autumn, all Canadians have been tested by concern over the H1N1 virus. The sheer size of the vaccination campaign has dwarfed all previous efforts – and Islanders are to be commended for their patience and concern for the well-being of their fellow citizens. My Government is also grateful to all those dedicated health professionals who have done such a tremendous job delivering the vaccine – and reassuring the Island public.

One Island, Working Together

Madame Speaker, one of the greatest and most successful examples of Islanders working together was our province's willingness to host the 2009 Canada Summer Games.

For the first time in our nation's history, the Games were held on a province-wide basis – and Island volunteers, athletes, families and communities reached across all boundaries to work toward a goal of common purpose. Many Islanders deserve our profound thanks – but I want to pay particular tribute to the work of the late Hon. Elmer MacFadyen, who did so much to lay the foundation for this successful event.

Over the last two years, my Government has worked tirelessly to encourage a unified approach to the challenges faced by our Island Community.

In response, I have been deeply impressed by the willingness of Islanders to confront the challenges of a changing world – and to embrace those concepts that will strengthen both themselves and their Island:

- Early in 2010, virtually every Island home and business will have access to high-speed Internet – and thousands of Islanders are taking up the new opportunities offered by rural broadband.
- The introduction of the George Coles Bursary has led to unprecedented increases in post-secondary enrolment – as young Islanders equip themselves with the tools they need to excel.
- More than 3,000 Island households have participated in programs offered by the Office of Energy Efficiency – increasing their personal comfort and economic security, while helping to protect our Island environment
- Young physicians are responding to our Island community's first Family Medicine Residency Program – and are helping to contribute to the reality that Islanders have better access to family doctors than most Canadians
- Island educators are working diligently to prepare for our province's introduction of full-day kindergarten in the public school system – and thousands of Island families will participate in the years to come

- Communities across our Island have contributed their time, effort and resources to the largest and most ambitious Capital Plan in provincial history – and have assisted my Government in its resolve to combat the worst effects of the global downturn in the economy.

Overcoming Adversity

Since my Government's last Speech from the Throne, the world's economy suffered a series of setbacks and challenges that continue to persist.
I am very proud that my Government was one of the first jurisdictions to recognize the threats associated with the global economy. Those actions have helped to shield our Island community from the recession's worst effects – and are continuing to help the sectors directly affected by the downturn.
Many tests remain before us – but I am confident that my Government has prepared itself to confront those challenges and subdue any lingering aftershocks of the global downturn.
My Government's bold response to embark on the unprecedented $510 million five-year Capital Plan – and its leading role in the Build PEI infrastructure programs – have assisted in this monumental effort. Since 2007, my Government has partnered with the Federal and Municipal governments on almost 250 infrastructure projects – representing a total injection of just over $200 million into our Island economy; however, these capital investments are merely the catalyst – the true leaders in the fight against economic recession are the individual Islanders and businesses who retain a disciplined sense of optimism and resolve in a changed and challenging world.
My Government has sought to provide many of the tools necessary in this effort – but it is Islanders who have wielded those tools so effectively.

Island Priorities

Over the course of the 3rd Session of the 63rd General Assembly, my Government has a number of initiatives planned to strengthen our Island community.
Each initiative is designed to complement our existing strengths – to improve the protection of Islanders – and to promote better programs and services:

- My Government will work to ensure the smooth transition of kindergarten into the public school system as a full-day program by September of 2010.
- Three Regional Business centres will be established in rural areas of the Island – to provide Island firms with one-stop access to the programs and services that they need to succeed and grow.
- With the support of my Government, Holland College will initiate a new Regional Training Centre in West Prince offering a number of programs to meet the social and economic needs of the region.
- Legislation will be introduced to establish a new arms-length organization, Health PEI, to deliver health services in PEI – drawing on community leadership under a strong monitoring and accountability framework to ensure integrated high quality health services Island-wide.
- The Tobacco Health Care Costs Recovery Act will permit the Province to pursue possible action to recover damages from large tobacco companies.
- Government will begin consultations this fall on gift card legislation to guard against the exploitation of the generosity of Islanders.
- A Social Prosperity Framework will be developed to support participation by all Islanders in the opportunities and benefits of our One Island Community – complementing our Island Prosperity Strategy and our Rural Development Strategy.
- Government will continue to pursue negotiations to reduce energy costs for Islanders.
- Government will continue to build on work initiated by the Premier to persuade the Federal Government to provide enhanced funding for post-secondary education.
- Government will continue to ensure tax fairness for Islanders – building on the actions that have already saved Islanders over $50 million since 2007. Starting in 2010, Government will take

action to link future changes in the owner-occupied component of residential property tax assessments to changes in the cost of living – with an expected zero increase in 2010.
- Amendments to the Highway Traffic Act will be introduced – to prevent the use of handheld devices while driving and promote safety on our roads.
- A Pesticides Control Act will dramatically reduce the use of lawn pesticides, affecting over 240 chemical products currently on store shelves.

One Island, One Health System

Shortly after being elected in mid-2007, my Government began a deliberate and comprehensive process, in collaboration with health professionals, staff and other stakeholders, to modernize our Island's health care system.

The temptation of short-term and ad hoc solutions was rejected in favour of a plan to fully integrate services and ensure that all Islanders have access to high quality health care for the long term.

Madame Speaker, I am proud that my Government had the courage to embark on this path – and work is well underway to transform and renew the way in which health care is sustainably delivered to Islanders.

Increasingly, a team approach to care will be used, enabling our most highly trained providers to focus their skills on the work that only they can do – and make the best use of all our resources.

Over the coming year, this new model will be implemented in showcase projects throughout the health care system – including Unit 3 at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, the surgery unit at Prince County Hospital, the acute care unit at Kings County Memorial Hospital, Wedgewood Manor and Summerside Home Care. The insights from these showcase projects will be used to refine the model for phased implementation throughout the health care system.

In the long term, a high quality, sustainable health care system can only be achieved through an effective governance structure. In keeping with the recommendations of the Health Governance Advisory Council, my Government will introduce legislation in this sitting of the House to move the operational and service delivery elements of the health care system – including pharmacy and dental programs – to a new arms-length entity, Health PEI. The legislation will establish clear roles, responsibilities and accountability for both the department and the new entity.

These measures may not be visible to Islanders on a day-to-day basis – but they are foundational to ensuring that Islanders will get the care they need long into the future. Over the coming year, my Government will work with our valued partners in the health care system to design and implement those changes.

Progress is also underway on many fronts to strengthen the health care and services that matter to Islanders. Some of those measures are aimed at reducing the toll of two of our most serious diseases – cancer and stroke:

- An expansion to the Island's Cancer Treatment Centre has been completed – and Islanders can now look forward to quicker, more efficient treatment.
- Cancer screening services are also being enhanced. A pilot screening program for colorectal cancer established earlier this year has already been expanded, and will be fully implemented on a province-wide basis this winter. With the valued support of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital Foundation and the Prince County Hospital Foundation, three new digital mammography machines have been acquired, enabling more accurate, timely breast cancer screening – and my Government has enhanced staffing and resources to attain those benefits and to reduce wait times.
- A provincial acute stroke care model is being put in place – including a stroke rehabilitation unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital – and a secondary prevention program province-wide to serve Islanders who have already had a stroke or mini-stroke.

Through these investments, lives will be saved.
Drugs are another integral element in the treatment of cancer and other chronic diseases:

- Over the past two years, my Government has increased funding for the Drug Program by almost $6 million or 22 per cent – adding almost 40 new drugs to the formulary and improving the health and quality of life of almost 3,500 Islanders with chronic illnesses.
- A year ago, my Government also introduced the Palliative Home Care Drug Pilot to cover the cost of drugs for pain and symptom management for Islanders in their final days of life, allowing them to receive care in the comfort of their homes or other location of choice. The pilot demonstrated benefits to both Islanders and the health care system, and is being extended and expanded through an additional investment of $750,000.

At the same time, major investments are being made to enhance our health care facilities and to support access to emergency care:

- Investments are being made throughout western PEI, including an expanded emergency department in Alberton, a new primary health centre in Tyne Valley, and expanded mental health and addictions services and long-term care beds in O'Leary.
- In Charlottetown, by late spring, emergency department renovations at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital will be completed, offering Islanders a more patient-centred care environment and accelerated construction of the new Ambulatory Care Centre will be underway.
- To support access to acute care when it is needed most, fees for air and ground ambulance transport to off-Island care were eliminated in 2008, and emergency ambulance user fees to seniors were eliminated in April 2009.
- Over the next five years, in excess of $50 million will be invested to replace five provincial manors across PEI, as a key component of my Government's recently announced Healthy Aging Strategy. This investment will serve the citizens that defined our society with the dignity and grace that they deserve as they age and their health care needs evolve.

Madame Speaker, my Government recognizes that health care must be provided equitably across all age groups.
For the last two years, Islanders have assisted Government in its effort to develop a strategy to reach out to youth with substance abuse problems. This month, a new Youth Day Treatment Program is commencing at the Royalty Centre – supported by home-like accommodations for youth who live beyond commuting range of the program.
One of the cornerstones of my Government's policy direction is to invest in the dedicated professionals who deliver care to Islanders.
The capacity to train nurses and other health care professionals has been increased – through the Licensed Practical Nursing Program in O'Leary and the Accelerated Nursing Program at the University of Prince Edward Island.
My Government is committed to the goal of a family physician for every Islander and is making progress. Today, PEI's complement of family physicians, and the number of physicians practicing are at all-time highs. Further benefits are expected through my Government's initiatives to add medical seats at Memorial University and to establish the Family Residency Program. Under this program, which began this past July, five family medicine residents are taking two years of training on our Island, providing valuable support to family physicians during their training, and possibly choosing to stay and practice on Prince Edward Island.
Starting in the winter of 2010, my Government will be introducing return in service grants to assist Island paramedics who upgrade their training to the level of Advanced Care Paramedic.
These and many other measures show the priority which my Government places on our One Island Health System. In the coming year, health will continue to be a top priority –

with particular emphasis on creating strong accountable governance for our One Island Health System – on implementing a new model of care that uses all our health human resources to the fullest in team-based care that puts the patient first – and on making the best and most efficient use of our health care beds, facilities and resources. These measures, and the ongoing commitment of our dedicated health care providers, will ensure that Islanders continue to receive high quality care that is sustainable into the future.

One Island, One Future Through Education

My Government recognizes and supports the Island belief that our future is fundamentally tied to improvements in the education system. From the very earliest years, to the most advanced post-secondary education, my Government will support all efforts to improve the services and programs offered to Islanders. My Government acknowledges the valued role played by our skilled, dedicated teachers and staff – working with learners and their families to ensure that every Island child has the opportunity to develop and achieve at the fullest of his or her potential.

The introduction of full-day kindergarten into the public school system is the Island's most significant educational measure in over a generation.

Island children will be better prepared for a lifetime of learning – and this massive and profoundly important undertaking will begin in September of 2010.

My Government is grateful to all those who are working so diligently to ensure a smooth transition to this new system – and looks forward to congratulating the 1,500 young Islanders who will be the first to complete this program in June 2011.

My Government is mindful that the magnitude of this change will have an impact on the early childhood sector. My Government recognizes that early childhood education and care holds lifelong benefits for children – and provides vital support to Island families. My Government is working with the early childhood sector to define the financial and human resource impacts and to identify potential transition measures to help the sector move toward sustainability. In the coming year, my Government will build on this work through a comprehensive review to establish a vision and long-term strategy for the healthy development and well-being of Island children and their families.

As our children progress beyond kindergarten and move through their formal education, they will discover an Island that will open doors at every stage of their lives. For over 400 Island children, these new doors opened this fall – as they gained access to a wider range of educational programs and services in their new schools. This outcome was only achieved after a difficult but necessary public process and debate to ensure that our school infrastructure best meets the changing needs of our student population.

My Government thanks all those who participated in this needed discussion about change in our Island's provision of educational resources. The energy, commitment and dedication to that debate are clear illustrations of healthy democratic discourse and the overarching goal of the best possible education for Island children.

At the same time, my Government is committed to investing in our post-secondary facilities and programs to help our young people fulfil their dreams – and to meet our Island's need for skilled workers in health care, education and industry. Since my Government came to office, funding to our valued post-secondary institutions has increased by over 30 per cent – from $35 million in 2006-2007 to almost $47 million this year.

In response, our post-secondary institutions are taking action to provide new and expanded education and training that will equip our youth to continue building our society and economy.

Holland College is building a new Science and Technology Centre in Charlottetown, with 280 new seats – doubling capacity to meet the needs of the growing bioscience sector and adding new programs in heritage retrofitting and energy conservation. In addition, Holland College has added a new iron-working program with almost 50 seats at the Georgetown Centre and is offering new programs in western PEI including wind energy in

Summerside and practical nursing in West Prince. And Canada's Smartest Kitchen, launched in October, will enable Holland College's world-leading Culinary Institute to partner with industry to create new value-added food products for the future.

In January 2009, the University of Prince Edward Island introduced an accelerated Bachelor of Nursing, allowing university graduates to gain their nursing degree in two years rather than the usual four. The first 14 nurses will graduate by the end of next year – and future cohorts will be trained in a new $7 million facility soon to be constructed. In January 2010, the university will launch a new specialized Bachelor of Education to support kindergarten teachers in their transition into the education system.

My Government has also placed priority on ensuring that as many Island youth as possible are able to access post-secondary education. Grants to the University of Prince Edward Island have helped keep its tuition rates among the most affordable in Atlantic Canada. Funding for grants and awards to students has increased more than five-fold with the establishment of the George Coles Bursary for first year students and enhancements to the Island Student Award and Island Skills Award.

In the first two years of this mandate, the number of post-secondary students receiving study grants and awards almost tripled from the level of 2006-2007 – rising from fewer than 1,200 to almost 3,400.

The results of these measures are clear. From 2006-2007 to 2008-2009, enrolment in PEI's post-secondary institutions jumped by 17 per cent – and initial UPEI data from September suggest further increases in the current year.

These enrolment increases hold potential for a future of security and prosperity both for our youth and for our province – but for this potential to be fully realized, our youth must also have opportunities to apply those skills here on the Island.

To ensure this, my Government is supporting the creation of almost 300 new skilled positions in Government and in the community that will provide full-year and half-year internships to young Islanders in fields relevant to their post-secondary studies. The Public Internship Program was launched earlier this fall – and drew over 800 applications for 50 one-year public service internships. In response to this strong demand, an additional 80 half-year opportunities will be established starting in January. As well, a Community Internship Program will be launched – investing $2.5 million in 150 internships in community and non-profit organizations. These measures will enable our youth to gain relevant work experience here at home – and to contribute their talents, ideas and energy to our public service and community sector.

The Promise of Community

Prince Edward Island has long been seen as a safe, caring and secure place to live. It continues to compare well with many other jurisdictions on those counts, offering an outstanding quality of life to most of its citizens. But some Islanders face a continuing struggle to make ends meet and raise their families – and the recession brings into focus Government's fundamental role in providing a social safety net.

My Government will continue to build on strategies and actions underway to promote the safety and security of Islanders and to include all Islanders in the benefits and opportunities of our society. Child protection services are being reviewed and revised to ensure consistent excellence across the province. A new training program for probation staff is achieving significant reductions in the rate of reoffending. Supports for youth at risk are being enhanced through a new 30-bed Child and Youth Centre.

Guided by the recommendations of the Disability Services Review, food and shelter allowances and community care rates under Social Assistance have been increased, and housing supports for persons with disabilities have been enhanced to improve their quality of life and inclusion. A Disability Advisory Council is being established to work with Government to increase social awareness and inclusion of persons with disabilities – and action will be taken over the coming year to ensure that Prince Edward Island is in compliance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Islanders in low income are being assisted with many costs that they face, through

investments in affordable housing, heating fuel, energy efficiency, home repairs, school breakfast and snack programs, public transit, the dental program and prescription drug costs. Since 2007, the minimum wage has increased by 12 per cent, and a review is underway to support additional increases in the coming year. To further protect more than 58,000 Island workers, significant changes to the Employment Standards Act will be introduced in this sitting of the Legislature – building on the first comprehensive review of this important legislation in over a decade.

Continued priority will also be placed on measures to safeguard the financial security of Islanders, building on our proclamation of a new Securities Act in 2008 and our passing of the Pay Day Loans Act last spring. In the coming year, my Government will carry out consultations to develop a new Pension Benefits Act for introduction in the fall of 2010 – and new legislation on gift cards to prevent exploitation of the generosity of Islanders.

Over the coming year, my Government will continue to develop existing programs and make them work together more effectively – and will explore and identify new measures to increase well-being and inclusion for all Islanders.

Acadian and Francophone Community / Communauté acadienne et francophone

My Government will continue to show leadership in the long term development of the Acadian and Francophone community, because it recognizes the essential contribution of that community to the economic, social and cultural fabric of our province.

My Governement recognizes the importance of access to French education. More than ever, we hope that our students have the opportunity to develop in the language of their choice. To help them do so, we are going forward with the construction of a new French language school in Rustico and will continue to support the Collège Acadie Î.-P.-É.

My Government will continue to participate in the promotion of the Acadian culture whose wealth is its strength. We will continue to build upon the success of existing and emerging artists in various disciplines by supporting them through programs such as the Acadian Cultural Development Program

Also, My Government has just recently renewed its Cooperation and Exchange Agreement with the Government of Quebec. This agreement will allow us to increase student exchanges and cooperation opportunities between both our provinces and contribute to the development of the Acadian and Francophone community.

Our First Islanders

In December 2007, my Government affirmed our relationship with our Aboriginal community through the Canada-PEI Mi'kmaq Partnership Agreement; and in April 2008, my Government pledged to define the structures needed to support that relationship. In keeping with this commitment, an Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat has been established in the Department of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour. The secretariat will help Government to better coordinate departmental activities related to Aboriginal issues, and to comply with the principles set out by the Partnership Agreement. The work of the secretariat will be guided by an advisory committee.

Working Together for Economic Prosperity

A future of opportunity and prosperity for all Islanders can only be built on the foundation of a strong economy. In a competitive and rapidly changing world, we must take a balanced approach. We must build on our long-established sectors such as fisheries, agriculture and tourism and also capture the potential of new industries for Prince Edward Island. To enable this growth, and to ensure that Islanders benefit to the fullest from economic growth and diversification, we must provide training and advanced education in a wide range of skilled occupations. We must also welcome new Islanders to

our province, recognizing that they strengthen our society through their diverse cultures, skills and resources.

My Government is deliberately and purposefully pursuing the goal of a diversified economy – through the $200 million, five-year Island Prosperity Strategy launched in 2008. Since then, almost $30 million has been invested or committed to research and innovation projects, skills and employment programs, tax measures and innovation infrastructure development in key new sectors that build on and extend our long-established strengths.

- Our growing biosciences sector completes a value chain that starts in Prince Edward Island's fields, forests and surrounding waters and that ends in its laboratories and advanced processing and manufacturing facilities. The coming year holds even greater promise for the sector with the establishment of the new BioCommons Research Park.
- Over the past 15 years, aerospace has developed into the Island's fastest growing industry. Nine companies now employ over 850 people and generate annual sales of almost $320 million. The aerospace industry continues to grow on Prince Edward Island despite the downturn in the North American industry, with employment up almost five per cent so far in 2009.
- In the energy sector, Prince Edward Island has been an innovator and national leader in the area of wind powered electrical generation. Currently, our Island produces 18 per cent of the province's electrical needs from clean technology at our domestic wind farms – and this will grow to 30 per cent, a level unmatched in any other jurisdiction.
- Growth is also taking place in the information technology sector. Summerside is becoming a centre of health-related information technology – and my Government is supporting this growth by investing in revitalization of the historic Holman Building.

In the coming year, the Island Prosperity Strategy will broaden and increase its investment in its three strategic pillars – Islanders, innovation and strategic infrastructure.

In our global society, our future success also depends on building a vibrant and diverse population. Immigration is making a vital contribution to this goal. From July 2008 to June 2009, our Island experienced its highest rate of population growth in a quarter century. Our population grew by over 1,500 people or more than one per cent – the highest growth rate of any province east of the Prairies.

Immigrant investment has also brought major benefits to Prince Edward Island. Over 1,500 applications under the Immigrant Partner Fund have been approved by the Federal Government, resulting in a net investment of $120 million in Island businesses.

Continued success now depends on welcoming these newcomers into our society. Major investments have already been made in this area, with year-over-year increases in seat purchases for language training, and an investment of $2.5 million a year in our schools to help integrate immigrant children. To build on these measures, my Government has worked with over 40 partners to develop a Settlement Strategy. The strategy, to be released shortly, will help new Islanders become a full part of our society, and encourage them to make the Island their home for the long term.

Renewing Rural Prince Edward Island

My Government is committed to a goal of building our One Island Community – but we recognize that PEI's urban and rural regions each have unique strengths, needs and opportunities. Rural PEI holds much of the wealth of our resources, our people and our culture and heritage – but like other rural areas worldwide, it also faces particular challenges in a changing world.

For that reason, my Government is investing in the infrastructure needed for rural economic growth, social well-being and transportation access. Earlier in this speech, I spoke of the investments in our hospitals, manors, schools and other public facilities. Those measures are complemented by investments, in partnership with the Federal and

Municipal governments, to upgrade our roads, modernize our water and sewer systems, and develop our recreational and community infrastructure throughout Prince Edward Island.

With the rapid evolution of information and communications technologies, broadband access has rapidly evolved into an essential service, as necessary today as electrical power was half a century ago. My Government pledged to make broadband access available across Prince Edward Island. By the end of November, it is expected that 19,000 rural Island households will have access to high-speed Internet – and access will be extended to virtually all remaining homes and businesses early in 2010.

To expand opportunities for all Islanders to participate in the public service and to gain access to their skills and commitment, my Government is moving two Government departments to communities outside the capital region. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has begun its relocation to Summerside, and facilities are under construction in Montague to house the Department of Fisheries, Aquaculture and Rural Development. These measures expand opportunities for high quality employment in rural Prince Edward Island and benefit the public service through greater access to the skills, talents and commitment of all Islanders.

As well, during the past year, my Government has carried out a complementary effort, working with Islanders to create a comprehensive Rural Economic Development Strategy. The work has spanned a conference of rural leaders, online survey input from over 600 Islanders, regional public forums and sectoral workshops. In all, over 1,200 Islanders have contributed to the strategy, the details of which will be released later this fall.

At this time, three highlights of the strategy are noted.

- Economic development requires a highly skilled, trained labour force – and lack of access to post-secondary education translates into lower skill levels, lagging economic growth and youth out-migration. These impacts are most clearly evident in rural PEI – and strong action is needed to reduce the barriers rural Islanders face.

  My Government will partner with Holland College to establish a Regional Training Centre in West Prince – offering a range of permanent and rotating programs to support the economic and social development of the region. Ongoing programs at the centre will include trades programs, adult education and post-secondary preparation courses. As well, the centre will provide rotating post-secondary programs at sites throughout West Prince – supporting skills development in such needed areas as health care, business management and information technology.
- Input to the Rural Development Strategy also indicated that top priority should be placed on economic development, and that improved delivery of economic services and supports was essential. In response, my Government will take action to establish three Regional Business centres throughout rural Prince Edward Island to support the growth and development of local businesses. The centres will bring together, under one roof, the province's staff, programs and resources related to business development and advisory services, labour market development and community development and training. To further promote the one-stop approach, my Government will invite federal and community partners to co-locate their economic and community development activities and services, and to work toward an integrated response to the needs and opportunities of Island businesses.
- Thirdly, action will be taken to ensure that the rural economy benefits as much and as quickly as possible from the extension of broadband Internet access to all parts of rural PEI. My Government will provide expert supports and resources to business operators through the Rural Broadband Fund, in partnership with Bell Aliant. Support will also be provided to rural tourism operators, through their regional tourism associations.

In the longer term, a prosperous and sustainable rural Prince Edward Island requires a sustainable environment and resource base, and strong, effective governance structures and leadership. To promote these goals, my Government established the Commission on the Land and Local Governance, and appointed former Justice Ralph Thompson as

Commission Chair. During the past year, Commissioner Thompson has carried out a thorough and extensive research and consultation effort, and is now completing his report. My Government looks forward to receiving his findings and recommendations later this year, as a foundation for its future actions in these vital areas.

Enhancing the Sustainability of Our Primary Industries

Madame Speaker, my Government's commitment to renewing rural Prince Edward Island within Our Island Community reflects a deep and abiding recognition that as our rural industries thrive, so does our province as a whole.

The future of our three core industries – agriculture, the fishery and tourism – will improve in tandem with the global economy. As demand again grows for our world-class products, my Government will continue its unflagging efforts to support these sectors.

Agriculture and a Rapidly Changing Marketplace

My Government is committed to the sustainable growth of the agriculture and agri-food industry in Prince Edward Island. To that end, in cooperation with the industry, it is establishing new directions for the future. It has begun the implementation of the major recommendations of the Report of the Commission on the Future of Agriculture and Agri-food. That industry-led report made a number of recommendations related to competitiveness, collaboration and sustainability – and my Government is moving forward in those areas.

In partnership with the Federal Government, our innovation programs are providing $1 million a year to encourage and assist applied research that will help our agricultural producers diversify, add value and increase competitiveness.

The department is working with producers to commercialize new crops such as crambe, hemp and borage, which can be produced and processed in Prince Edward Island, and to support and encourage transitions to organic production.

Farmers' access to capital has been improved through interest payments under the Advanced Payments Program, and a new loan program to help stabilize hog production.

My Government remains committed to the Atlantic Beef Products plant as a key component of the ongoing development of the livestock industry in this region – and welcomes the appointment of a new board of directors with a strong business focus on moving toward profitability.

My Government is supporting programs to enable the industry to become more environmentally sustainable. The Alternative Land Use Services Program provides $1 million a year to recognize and reward landowners who benefit the environment by protecting sensitive lands and waterways. Prince Edward Island is the first province in Canada to implement this program on a province-wide basis. In addition, the Canada-Prince Edward Island Stewardship Program provides a further $1 million a year for on-farm conservation projects.

Over the coming months, my Government plans to develop funding programs that will help Island farmers reduce their operating costs, create new crop and revenue opportunities and provide environmental benefits to Islanders. These initiatives will centre on enhanced crop diversification and renewable energy opportunities.

Embracing a Tourism Strategy

Madame Speaker, Prince Edward Island's tourism industry brings visitors and economic activity to communities throughout the province and supports a range of amenities and services that enhance Islanders' quality of life.

While many other provinces experienced a sharp downturn in tourism this past year, PEI achieved gains in some areas during the first nine months of 2009. Compared to the same period in 2008, vehicle traffic to PEI increased by seven per cent, and overnight stays in campgrounds surged by over 40,000 nights or 22 per cent. These achievements

in challenging market conditions are a tribute to industry leadership and to shared success in developing new products that appeal to visitors. My Government will continue to work with the industry to further develop our strengths and capture new opportunities in the year ahead.

Visitors come to our Island for its natural beauty – and for our rich culture and way of life. My Government's tourism strategy is founded on these strengths, recognizing that we can best compete by being true to ourselves.

Cultural events are increasingly important to visitors seeking authenticity and a spirit of place. This area has long been a strength for PEI, with the Charlottetown Festival, the Rollo Bay Fiddle Festival, the Festival of Lights, and exhibitions and fairs across the province. New events like the Cavendish Beach Music Festival have brought tens of thousands of visitors to Prince Edward Island.

In 2010, my Government will extend these successes through a Cultural Explosion strategy, to make PEI 'Canada's East Coast Cultural Capital.' The strategy will place particular emphasis on increased visitation in late spring and early fall – by enhancing and refreshing our long-established strengths – by developing our newer offerings such as the Festival of Small Halls – and by creating innovative new events.

Our outstanding food products are iconic symbols of PEI – and a major asset in the rapidly growing culinary tourism sector. To tap these opportunities while promoting awareness, demand and exports of PEI food products, my Government has led the establishment of a Culinary Alliance. This partnership between PEI's tourism, agriculture and fishery sectors will showcase the excellence of PEI's food products and food experiences – while extending vibrant tourism activity further into the fall season across the Island.

These plans hold great potential for further growth in tourism, while also enhancing the quality of life for Islanders. To ensure that tourism operators benefit from those opportunities, my Government is implementing the Integrated Tourism Solution, an information technology system which includes a visitor database and a central reservation system. The system offers increased choice and better service to visitors while giving tourism operators access to a larger customer pool. Over the coming year, my Government will assist additional tourism operators to take up these opportunities.

My Government will also invest in the infrastructure PEI needs to more fully tap the potential of the conventions and meetings market. It remains my Government's commitment, in partnership with the Federal Government and the industry, to expand our meeting and convention business capacity through development of the convention centre and Queens Wharf District on our historic Charlottetown waterfront – making it the 'best in class' in Canada.

Fisheries: A Five Point Plan

Madame Speaker, our Island's fishing and aquaculture sectors are the heart of our coastal communities.

In the wake of the global economic downturn, the lobster fishery had a difficult year. In mid-May, my Government took action to address those challenges through the Five Point Plan working in partnership with the Federal Government. The Five Point Plan has delivered support to meet both the immediate and the long-term needs of the industry. Funds were invested to purchase and store canner lobster for later sale to Island processing plants. As well, a bridge loan was provided to the industry in LFA25 to allow 24 licences to be removed from the fishery for the season – one-tenth of all licences in the area. Taken together with a 15 per cent increase in the total catch, this meant a significant increase in the average catch for the remaining fishers in the area. Work continues with the Federal Government to implement an industry-led rationalization program that will sustain our lobster resources and enhance the viability of the fishery in both LFA25 and LFA26A. The low-interest loan program was extended to fishers based upon their 2008 and 2009 years – and the program will be further enhanced to permit fishers who employ their spouses to participate in the program, if they meet the financial

criteria.
In the longer term, it is critical to shift lobster sales away from a commodity-based business model to higher value markets where both fishers and processors can receive higher returns. In support of this goal, my Government has allocated $2 million to work with Island fishers and processors and with the Federal Government on product development, technology innovation and marketing.
Our aquaculture sector was not as hard hit by the economic downturn, but continues to face operating challenges and costs in dealing with invasive species. My Government will continue to work with the Island mussel industry with funding to assist in the development and implementation of technology solutions to treat and remove tunicate fouling. Programming to support the development of the world famous 'Malpeque' oyster is ongoing, and will seek to tap new opportunities through the Culinary Alliance.

Environmental Protection and Energy Security

All Islanders have a role to play in protecting and enhancing our environment. My Government believes it is essential to support Islanders and Island businesses who contribute to a safer and healthier environment.
Our Water...Our Land
Our watersheds play a critical role in the health of our environment and the quality of our drinking water. Watershed groups are an outstanding example of community participation and shared responsibility. In response, my Government has substantially increased funding for the Watershed Management Program to increase the capacity and sustainability of the groups – and to enable them to carry out and implement improvement plans. Additional funding will be provided to watershed groups in 2010 to allow them to build upon the success of their efforts.
In 2008, the Commission on Nitrates in Groundwater submitted its report. My Government has adopted all the recommendations of the report, and has already acted in several areas – including free nitrate testing for all Islanders in 2008 and 2009, and a ban on the spreading of raw septage. An implementation plan has been developed for the remaining recommendations and will be carried out in the coming year and beyond.
To further protect our water resources and our fragile but vital soil resource – and in keeping with the recommendations of the Nitrate Commission – my Government will exempt environmentally sensitive land from ownership limits of the Lands Protection Act. This measure will encourage farmers to take sensitive land out of crop production – enhancing the protection of those lands.
Madame Speaker, key stakeholders such as the Canadian Cancer Society and the Environmental Health Coalition have actively called on Government to pass legislation to reduce and restrict the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes. In response, my Government will introduce a Pesticide Control Act to ban a number of lawn pesticides and to ensure that others are used only by trained commercial operators under strict conditions. This initial measure will remove over 240 chemicals from store shelves – and is expected to lead to a significant reduction in the overall use of lawn pesticides in Prince Edward Island.

Securing Lower Cost Green Energy for Islanders

Heating fuel, electricity and gasoline are basic needs of every Islander. Our Island has long been dependant on external sources of supply and high energy costs. Over the past two years, our vulnerability has increased as global prices and supply of traditional energy sources have fluctuated. My Government is working to improve access by Islanders to dependable, secure, affordable energy.
Energy security starts at home with energy efficiency and development of our own sources of supply. In October 2008, my Government released its Conservation and Renewable Energy Strategy, and its Ten-Point-Plan for the development of our wind energy resource. The recent call for proposals for new wind energy projects will lead to

an additional 30 megawatts of clean, safe wind energy for Islanders – and up to 100 megawatts for export.

The Office of Energy Efficiency was established in early 2008. Since that time, 3,000 Island households have been assisted to reduce their energy use and costs, and to make their homes warmer and more comfortable. My Government has been able to secure additional federal funding for this initiative, allowing the Low-Income Loan Program to be offered to an additional 3,500 Island families.

Recognizing that wind energy can only meet a portion of our Island's needs, my Government is continuing its active discussions with other eastern provinces to secure enhanced access to a reliable, low-cost energy supply that is not dependant on fossil fuels.

One Island's Future Is Also Our Past

The 2009 Canada Summer Games demonstrated Prince Edward Island's hospitality – and its outstanding ability to host an entire nation.

Looking ahead, British Columbia will host the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games in February and the Paralympic Games in March. Prince Edward Island is proud to be a contributing sponsor of this global event. February 18 will be PEI Day at the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Games – showcasing the talents of our performers and artists – and featuring past and present Island athletes in events including a torch relay and spirit rally. On behalf of all Islanders, my Government wishes our Island athletes well and thanks them for their years of tireless effort to prepare themselves for competition. Our athletes and artists will represent the Island well – and we are very proud of them.

There is another marquee event on the horizon.

In 2014, all Canadians will mark the 150th Anniversary of the 1864 Charlottetown Conference which gave birth to Confederation and our federal nation state itself.

2014, Madame Speaker, is an important historical milestone in both the life of this Island province as the recognized birthplace of Confederation, and the life of our country as a whole.

My Government already has begun planning for this anniversary and the knowledge and talents of many will be called upon.

I am more than confident that together we will create a national stage upon which the political and historical genesis of Canada can be commemorated and celebrated.

Since 2007, my Government has worked with Islanders to set the directions and take the measures to ensure a strong, successful and prosperous future for our One Island Community – and my Government pledges to continue this partnership in the years to come.

Madame Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly.

May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.

Prince Edward Island CANADA

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